LIS
Working Paper Series

No. 868

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October 2023

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September, 2023

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Single mothers and child support in extended-family households: an international perspective

Abstract: Extended-family households are a common arrangement among single mothers in various countries. Using Luxembourg Income Study data from waves 2014-2019, we study child support receipt among single mothers living in extended-family households in Chile, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, the United States, and Uruguay. We have three aims: (1) to present the prevalence and characteristics of single mothers living in extended-family households; (2) to compare the level of child support received by extended-family and other single-mother households; and (3) to examine whether living in an extended-family household is a predictor of child support receipt across countries. We find the characteristics of mothers in extended family households vary by country. Overall, mothers in extended family households are more likely to be younger, have lower levels of education, are less likely to be employed, and are somewhat less likely to receive child support compared to other single mothers.

Introduction

Single motherhood has increased in various parts of the world, including countries within the European Union (EU) (Bradshaw, Keung, and Chzhen 2018; Nieuwenhuis 2020), the United States (Miho and Thévenon 2020), and Latin American countries (Esteve, Castro-Martín, and Castro Torres 2022; Liu, Esteve, and Treviño 2017), among others. Single-mother families, defined as those in which a mother lives with her own children under 18 years old and is either divorced, separated, or unmarried (Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela 2018) are particularly vulnerable and at higher risk of poverty compared to two-parent families (e.g., Maldonado and Nieuwenhuis 2015; Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela 2018), raising concerns about gender equality. Single mothers often rely on external support to fulfill their dual roles as caregivers and providers (UN Women 2019). In addition to public family benefits, some single mothers may co-reside with other related adults as a strategy to cope with financial challenges and to share caregiving responsibilities, including caring for children or other family members, including aging adults (Cerrutti and Binstock 2009; Reyes 2020). It is estimated that at least half of single mothers worldwide live in extended-family households, though prevalence varies across regions and countries (UN Women 2019). Despite the prevalence of extended-family households among single mothers, there is limited understanding about how this family structure interacts with various policies.

Child support policy holds particular significance for single-parent families. Child support, or child maintenance, is a financial transfer between parents not living together, in which one parent, the noncustodial parent (usually the father), is obligated to transfer resources (monetary and/or in-kind) to the other parent, the custodial parent, to share the financial responsibility of

raising their children (Hakovirta, Meyer, and Skinner 2021; Hakovirta et al. 2022; Kurz 2003). There is evidence from various countries indicating that receipt of child support is associated with lower rates of poverty among single-mother families (Bartfeld 2000; Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela 2018; Cuesta and Meyer 2014; 2018; Meyer and Hu 1999) and that this income is crucial for custodial mothers and their children to meet basic needs (Vogel 2020). However, despite the significance of child support for single-mother families, a notable proportion of eligible families do not receive it (Cuesta and Meyer 2012; Ríos-Salas and Meyer 2014; Cuesta and Meyer 2018; Cuesta, Guarin, and Eickmeyer 2022; Hakovirta and Mesiäislehto 2022). For mothers in extended-family households, if fathers perceive that single mothers are receiving support from other household members, they may reduce the financial support they provide to their children, which can impact the economic well-being of the custodial mother and her children. Alternatively, if single mothers do not receive child support, they may decide to co-reside with other family members to get additional support.

This study aims to examine the prevalence of extended households among single mothers and their child support receipt in Chile, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, the United States, and Uruguay. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that analyzes the role of child support in extended families from a comparative perspective. We take a comparative approach to understanding the role of extended families in child support receipt because child support and family contexts differ markedly across countries. Therefore, we selected countries that offer variation in the prevalence of single-parent and extended-family households. This allows us to conduct meaningful comparisons and analyses across different contexts, providing greater insight into the relationship between extended families and child support.

We use data from countries with comparable measures and an adequate sample size of single mothers in extended households in the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) database from years 2014-2019. We first present the prevalence and characteristics of single mothers living in extended-family households. Then, we compare the level of child support received by single mothers by whether they live in extended-family households; finally, we examine whether living in an extended-family household is a predictor of child support receipt across countries. Findings inform the understanding of the association between child support and extended families in different policy and cultural contexts. Additionally, this study can provide greater insight into the role of extended families in child support receipt, especially in regions where the prevalence of extended families is increasing but policy has yet to catch up. Such households may pose challenges for policies that were originally designed to support traditional family units, raising issues of equity, adequacy, eligibility, and allocation of resources for households with children (Berger and Carlson 2020).

Background

Single-parents and extended-family households

In recent decades, an increasing number of children are spending at least part of their childhood in a single-parent home, most commonly with a single mother (Nieuwenhuis 2020; Cerrutti and Binstock 2009). This pattern has been evident across geographic and cultural contexts, with evidence indicating an increase in countries from Europe to Latin America to the United States. In 2018, the proportion of children living with a single parent in OECD countries ranged from 8% in Turkey to a high of 26% in the United States (Miho and Thévenon 2020; Kramer et

al. 2019). Estimates from Central and South America indicate that children living with one parent ranged from 19% in Bolivia (2008) and Perú (2012) to 37% in Colombia (2015) (Institute for Family Studies 2019).

Single mothers and their children are at a higher risk of living in poverty and generally are more disadvantaged across a number of domains compared to two-parent families (Nieuwenhuis 2020; Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela 2018; Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado 2018; Lucchetti et al. 2016). Extended-family arrangements may provide additional resources in these circumstances. In extended families, there is usually a host family unit, and some guest family members that are welcomed into the household (Reyes 2020). Moving in with other family members, or having family members move in, can reduce housing costs, increase opportunities to pool other resources (Reyes 2020), and satisfy different kinds of generational needs such as childcare, care for older adults or for children or others with disabilities. Given that extended-family households may play a protective role against economic hardships, by providing a safety net of economic support for family members in need, increases in the prevalence of single mothers and resulting economic vulnerability may be related to increases in the prevalence of extended-family households (specifically, three generation households where a mother typically lives with her children and one or more parents) in recent years (Pilkauskas and Cross 2018). This living arrangement can be particularly important for single mothers and their children as it might enable them to count on other relatives to participate in childcare, thus reducing the conflict single mothers face between work and care (Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado 2018; Reyes 2020; Tilahun et al. 2021; Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012; Gupta, Ksoll, and Maertens 2021). Additionally, having this network of support can also improve the food and economic security levels of single mothers and their children (Alderete, Sonderegger, and Pérez-Stable 2018; Kamo 2000).

The prevalence of extended family households varies by region and country. On a global scale, extended family households are more prevalent in Central/South America, Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa than other parts of the world (Child Trends 2015; Esteve, Castro-Martín, and Castro Torres 2022). In Central and South America, extended families have been historically common and continue to be one of the main family structures (Child Trends 2015), with estimates indicating that the proportion of children living in extended-family households ranged between 39% (Bolivia) to 55% (Colombia and Nicaragua) between 2000-2014 (Child Trends 2015). Although extended family households are less common in Europe than in Latin America, in Central-Eastern Europe (20% - 44%) and Southern Europe (27% - 36%) a considerable share of the population lives in extended households (with or without children) (Oláh 2015). Estimates for the proportion of children, specifically, in extended households also indicate that this is a common experience for children in some countries. In Europe, this includes a high of 43% of children in Romania (2002) and 34% in Spain (2001) who lived with related adults in addition to parents. Finally, Cross (2018) estimated that around 16% of children in the United States experienced extended family co-residence and around 35% of children lived in some extended-family household configuration during their childhood (Cross 2018).

Extended-family households are particularly common among the more disadvantaged (Cross 2018) including single-parent households. More than half of single mothers in Central and Southern Asia (67%) and close to half in Northern Africa and Western Asia (46%), Sub-Saharan Africa (46%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (45%) live in extended-family households. Only in Europe and North America do considerably less than half of single mothers live in extended family households (32%) (UN Women 2019). In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico, this proportion is even higher (70%) when considering younger

single-mothers (Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012). Although these figures vary greatly within regions (Esteve, Castro-Martín, and Castro Torres 2022; Hogendoorn and Härkönen 2023), they provide an overview of how common extended-family households are among single mothers.

Country context and child support schemes

Table 1 presents key characteristics of the countries studied, including the prevalence of children living in single-mother families, child poverty rates in two parent and single-mother families, indicators of gender parity (as measured by the Global Gender Gap Index), spending on social assistance and family benefits, and each country's child support regime. Each measure in this table provides important context with which to understand our findings. The prevalence of single parent households and comparative poverty rates provide a crucial starting point, and the use of Global Gender Gap to measure gender parity (which includes four key dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment) (World Economic Forum 2022) is salient given the higher poverty rates in single-mother households. Similarly, in the context of high poverty among single-mother families and partial gender parity, spending on social assistance and family benefits takes on relevance as a means to support vulnerable families.

[Table 1 about here]

For countries in our study, the prevalence of children living with a single mother ranges from 10% in Spain to 28% in Chile. Poverty rates are consistently higher for children living in single-mother families than for those living with two parents; child poverty rates in single-mother families ranged from 17% in Guatemala to 46% in the United States. All countries in this study have closed around 70% of their gender gap, which is still far from the top ten countries in the

Global Gender Gap Report which have closed at least 80% of their gender gaps (World Economic Forum 2022).

Chile has the highest spending on social assistance and family benefits (3.5% of GDP and 1.7% of GDP) while other countries such as Panama and the United States spend less than 1% of their GDP in either social assistance or family benefits, substantially below the OECD average for family benefits public spending (2.1%) (OECD 2023). On the whole, most of the countries in this study present a challenging societal context for single mother-families with high child poverty rates, partial gender parity, and varying degrees of social assistance and public spending.

As many single mothers are economically vulnerable, one policy that may improve the economic well-being of single mothers and their children is child support policy. When parents do not live together countries require child support payments from the other parent but the amounts to be transferred differ dramatically across countries. These differences can be explained, in part, due to how countries approach child support policy (Cuesta et al. 2023; Hakovirta et al. 2022; Hakovirta, Cook, and Sinclair 2021).

In an earlier comparative study on child support systems, Skinner, Bradshaw, and Davidson (2007) analyzed some key aspects of the child support systems across 14 countries. They considered the logics of formal decision making, the determination of child support obligations and the enforcement and penalty provisions used in the event of non-compliance. Three main types of child support schemes emerged: agency-based systems, court-based systems, and hybrid systems in which the courts and another agency/institution are involved in decision making. This categorization was expanded to include new countries by Skinner and Hakovirta (2020) and Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela (2018) for Latin American countries.

Table 1 shows that six countries operate a primarily court-based national system: Chile, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Spain and Uruguay (Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela 2018; Hakovirta et al. 2022; Skinner and Hakovirta 2020). In these countries the main responsibility to determine and enforce child support orders lies within the judicial system. Peru and the United States represent a hybrid scheme, in which both the judicial system and public agencies play a role in the main tasks of child support (Ríos-Salas and Meyer 2014; Hakovirta et al. 2022; Cuesta et al. 2023). In the United States the responsibility for the determination of child support obligations may lay with several institutions, for example with the municipal welfare board and/or the court. In Peru the court system and public agencies determine child support (Ríos-Salas and Meyer 2014; Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela 2018). None of our comparison countries operate with agency schemes only. In general, countries with agencies are more likely to operate with more standardized methods for the determination of child support obligations, such as strict formulas. Court-based systems, on the other hand, use less prescriptive 'guidelines' or operate often with a high level of discretion. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the different institutional child support settings and discretion within court-based schemes might have an effect on child support determination and, notably, how extended family resources are accounted for.

An emerging literature has documented how re-partnering, multiple partner fertility, and the resources of the non-custodial parents are accounted for in calculating child support amounts (e.g., Cancian and Meyer 2011). Additionally, prior evidence shows that there is considerable variation across countries in how the resources of parents are accounted for (Skinner, Bradshaw, and Davidson 2007) and how second families are considered in calculating child support amounts (Meyer and Skinner 2016). However, so far, there is little empirical work on how child support orders are modified based on single mothers' household structure, nor how orders and amounts

are affected by the presence of other adults in the household. Indeed, relatively little is known about how extended family members and their resources are considered in child support determination.

Conceptually, there are different potential approaches to this question. First, if single mothers are living with other adults, it is possible the other adults can bring new resources into the household to share with children. In this case, fathers can count on the additional support that a single mother is receiving and may reduce the financial support they provide to their children. This might lead to a lower amount of child support received by single mothers. Second, child support policy rules might consider the resources of other adults in the households in the determination of child support which may lead to lower orders. Finally, in other cases the determination of child support only includes the resources of paying parents which means that single mothers' resources are not considered.

Prior research on child support determinants

Prior work on the correlates of child support receipt considers custodial parent characteristics, noncustodial parent characteristics, and the characteristics of the child support system in place (Cuesta and Meyer 2012; Cancian and Meyer 2011; Ríos-Salas and Meyer 2014; Cuesta 2023). At the custodial parent level, many factors have been considered. Of particular interest for the current study is the potential influence of the custodial mother's family structure or living arrangement on the likelihood that a noncustodial father will provide child support. Prior work indicates that custodial mothers living in three-generation households are less likely to receive non-cash support (Guarin and Costanzo 2020). Similarly, maternal re-partnering has been associated with a decrease in child support received by the mother but new-partner fertility for mothers who are co-residing with a partner was not associated with an additional decrease in child

support receipt (Berger, Cancian, and Meyer 2012). In that sense, factors that can impact a noncustodial father's payment of child support might include his perception of whether the needs of the child and the custodial mother are being fulfilled somehow; and/or when the mother has repartnered or has had other children of her own (Meyer and Cancian 2012). Likewise, the number of adults in a child's household—independent of their kinship— is negatively associated with the amount of cash and in-kind support received (Garasky et al. 2010).

In addition to the custodial mother living arrangements, other factors have been considered as correlates of child support receipt. Such factors include different characteristics of the mother, such as ethnicity, level of education, employment status, and their age (Garasky et al. 2010). Custodial mothers with a high-income level have a higher likelihood of receiving support (Cuesta and Meyer 2012; Ha, Cancian, and Meyer 2011). Also, mothers who identify as Black, work more hours, and own their homes may have lower amounts of child support receipt (Garasky et al. 2010). In contrast, White mothers, older mothers, and mothers with high levels of education are more likely to receive child support. Mothers who have never been married are less likely to receive any support in comparison with separated or divorced mothers (Allen, Nunley, and Seals 2011; Cuesta and Meyer 2012; Ha, Cancian, and Meyer 2011; Huang 2009).

Current Study

In the current study, we take a comparative approach to understanding how living in an extended-family household may be associated with single mothers' child support receipt. We build upon Cuesta's (2023) work on child support determinants in Latin America to examine the association between child support receipt and extended family households in eight countries with comparable data that offer contrasts in the prevalence of these households. We aim to answer three research questions with the following hypotheses. First, how do the prevalence and characteristics

of single mothers differ from those of single mothers who live in extended-family households? We hypothesize that single mothers living in extended-family households are more disadvantaged than single mothers not living in extended-family households. Second, what is the difference in the level (prevalence and amount) of child support received by single mothers compared to single mothers living in extended-family households? We hypothesize that single mothers living in extended-family households receive less child support than single mothers not living in extended-family households. Finally, is living in an extended-family household a predictor of child support receipt across countries? We hypothesize that after controlling for other characteristics living in an extended-family household is no longer a significant predictor of child support receipt.

Data, Sample, Measures, and Methods

Data and sample

We use the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Database from the most recent year available in each country (waves 2014-2019). Individual countries each submit the data to LIS, and LIS harmonizes these data to make them comparable across countries. The LIS data include information on household composition, income, expenditure, and employment (for more information, see Ravallion 2015). Although this is the standard data source for cross-country studies, not all Latin American countries provide variables on child support, and not all countries include the same variables on household composition, which limited the number of countries we were able to include in our study (see also Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela 2018). Our sample includes information on a total of 17,525 single mothers split across all the eight countries: Chile, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, the United States and Uruguay (See Table 2). We define single-mother households as households with a mother and her under-18-year-old child or

children. In our analysis, extended family consists of a mother and her child(ren), and adult relatives.

Method

We use descriptive statistics to present the proportion of single mothers with children in each country living in extended-family households, to examine the characteristics of single mothers in extended-family households, and to document child support receipt rates and child support amounts. We then conduct a series of multivariate models to test whether the presence of extended relatives is associated with the likelihood of child support receipt.

Measures

Extended-family household

We define extended family households as single-mothers living with relatives and her under-18-year-old child(ren). Though a small number of widows may be eligible for child support (e.g., if they had a child with someone, split, then married another person who then died while the child was still a minor), we exclude widows from our analysis because we cannot differentiate those eligible for support from those who are not.

Child support

Child support refers to monetary child support and alimony received from another household, and it is reported at the household level. The LIS data do not distinguish between child support and alimony; however, very few receive alimony (see Meyer and Hu 1999) and we anticipate this is unlikely to change our findings. In all countries, child support includes cash child support, whether formal (with a legal order) or informal (without a legal order) child support. We

use two measures. The dichotomous measure indicates whether the child lives in a family that received any child support and the continuous measure indicates the total annual amount of child support that family received in the past year. In the LIS data, incomes are in national currencies. We adjust these amounts to US dollars using the 2017 purchasing power parities (PPP) of the International Comparison Program (ICP) managed by the World Bank, considered the most reliable measure for comparisons between Latin American countries (Chen and Ravallion 2008). The conversion allows us to compare amounts across countries.

Control variables

Following previous studies on child support among single mother families, we control for the following background variables at the single mother level: age (continuous), education (low, medium, high), employment status in the past week, number of children (one, two, three or more) and disposable income quintile. Incomes are adjusted using the square root equivalence scale.

Results

Descriptive analysis

We first present the prevalence and characteristics of single mothers in extended-family households across countries. The proportion of single mothers who live in extended family households ranges from a low of 18% in Chile to more than half (57%) of all single mothers in Guatemala (See Table 2).

[Table 2 about here]

When comparing the characteristics of other single mothers with those living in extended-family households, we find significant variation and differences within countries (See Table 3). A

few trends emerge. In all countries age differences are statistically significant, with single mothers in extended-family households being younger than their counterparts in most countries (Guatemala, Paraguay, Spain, the United States, and Uruguay) with the exception of Chile, Panama, and Peru. Differences in education levels are also statistically significant across countries, except in Peru. Consistently, single mothers in extended-family households have lower education levels in all countries apart from Guatemala, where they are slightly more educated. Next, employment differences are not as significant as differences in age and education. However, where statistically significant, single mothers living in extended-family households are less likely to be employed than single mothers living with children only (Guatemala, Paraguay, the United States, and Uruguay). Finally, we find some differences regarding the number of children. In most countries with significant differences, a smaller proportion of single mothers in extended-family households have two or more children when compared to single mothers living with children alone (Chile, Guatemala, Paraguay, the United States, and Uruguay). Only in Panama and Peru do mothers in extended family households have more children than other single mothers. Taken together, single mothers living in extended-family households are younger, less educated, less likely to be employed and have fewer children overall, with a few differences across countries. These overall patterns of differences support our first hypothesis that single mothers in extended-family households are more disadvantaged compared to other single mothers.

[Table 3 about here]

Next, we compare child support received (prevalence and amount) by single mothers compared to single mothers living in extended-family households. Table 4 presents the prevalence of child support receipt and median amount of child support (PPP) for single mothers living with children compared to single mothers living with children in extended-family households. The

proportion of single mothers living with children who received child support ranged from a low of 20% in Guatemala to a high of 58% in Uruguay; in comparison, the proportion of single mothers living in extended-family households who received child support ranged from 9% in Spain to 45% in Peru. In most countries, a smaller proportion of single mothers living in extended-family households received child support compared to single mothers living with children only. Differences in the proportion receiving child support ranged from a low of 4 percentage points in Paraguay and Peru to a high of 22 in Spain and 17 in Uruguay. Only in Panama and Peru did a higher proportion of mothers in extended households receive child support compared to other single mothers (42% vs 35% in Panama, and 50% vs 46% in Peru).

[Table 4 about here]

Comparison of median child support levels shows that in five out of eight countries (Chile, Panama, Paraguay, Spain and Uruguay), single mothers living with children receive slightly higher amounts of child support compared to single mothers living with children in extended-family households. The difference is most marked in Spain and the United States, where the median amount of child support is 1.4 times higher for single mothers living with children compared to those living with children and relatives. In Panama, Paraguay, and Peru the median amount of child support is roughly the same for both groups. The cross-country comparison also shows that there is great variation in the levels of child support among the eight countries studied. In Spain and the United States, the median amount of child support is significantly higher than in the other countries. Among the six Latin American countries included in the analysis, the lowest median amounts of child support are found in Guatemala and the highest in Panama. These results are in line with our second hypothesis that single mothers living in extended households are less likely

to receive child support and the amounts they receive are lower than single mothers not living in extended-family households.

Multivariate analysis

We then estimated logistic regressions predicting child support receipt by country, including a key indicator for whether the mother lives in an extended family household and controlling for age, education, number of children, employment status, and income quintile. We find significant differences in the likelihood of child support receipt for mothers in extended-family households, even when controlling for additional characteristics, for five of the eight countries in our sample: Chile, Guatemala, Spain, the United States and Uruguay. In all cases, the coefficient is significant and negative, with single mothers in extended family households being less likely to receive child support than single mothers living with children only (Model 1 in Table 5). Additionally, we estimated models controlling for whether the single mother is the head of household (not available in Chile). In this model, we still find a negative association between living in an extended family and child support receipt in Uruguay and in the United States. Even though coefficients were no longer significant for Guatemala and Spain, their negative direction remained. In Panama, Paraguay, and Peru the association between living in an extended family and child support was positive, however, the association is statistically significant only in Paraguay when headship was included in Model 2.

[Table 5 about here]

Sensitivity tests

To further explore our results, we included interaction terms in regressions for countries where there are significant results for our key indicator: Chile, Guatemala, Spain, the United States, and Uruguay. We interacted the key indicator for living in an extended-family households

with measures of income, employment, number of children, and education (See Appendix Figures A.1-A.4).

The interactions indicate that differences in child support receipt by extended family status may be driven by different subgroups in different countries. The difference in the likelihood of child support receipt for single mothers in Guatemala and the United States is roughly the same for mothers in extended households and those living only with their children across high and low income and employment. However, in Chile, while similar proportions of higher-income mothers and employed mothers receive child support, there are large differences for lower-income mothers and unemployed mothers, suggesting that the decreased likelihood of receipt for mothers in extended households in Chile is the result of differences for lower-resourced mothers. We find the opposite in Spain, where lower-income mothers in extended households report receiving child support in higher proportions; the decreased likelihood of receipt in Spain seems to be the result of differences in receipt for higher-resourced mothers in extended households.

Furthermore, we find that in Guatemala, the likelihood of child support receipt for single mothers in extended families is equally low across educational levels while for single mothers in non-extended families, the likelihood of receiving child support is highest for those with higher educational level. In other countries, we find no significant differences by education. Lastly, the interactions indicate that the difference in the likelihood of receiving child support for single mothers living in extended compared to non-extended families remains more or less the same regardless of the number of children in the household.

Discussion

Using LIS data, we examine child support receipt and the prevalence of extended-family households among single mothers in Chile, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, the United

States, and Uruguay. Our work adds to the limited evidence on the interaction between child support receipt and single mother's living arrangements.

We find some differences in the prevalence and the characteristics of single mothers with children living in extended-family households across countries. Though overall, and in keeping with the previous literature (Guarin and Costanzo 2020), mothers in extended family households are to some extent more disadvantaged--more likely to be younger, have lower levels of education and less likely to be employed--this was not true in all cases. In Peru, for example, mothers in extended family households are older, and there are no differences in education level. This suggests that though there may be some common threads and drivers of extended family households, extended family households may differ across contexts (Hogendoorn and Härkönen 2023).

We find that, in general, single mothers in extended-family households are less likely to receive child support than other single mothers. This holds in the descriptive analysis for most countries in our sample, and, for many countries, in a multivariate context. The results also show that single mothers in extended families receive lower amounts of child support compared to other single mothers in five out of eight countries. In Uruguay, the average amount of child support was 1.6 times lower for single mothers in extended families compared to other single mothers. That we find decreased likelihood of receipt in over half of the countries in our sample when controlling for differences in family characteristics is notable. This, along with the overall disadvantaged nature of families in extended households as evidenced through the comparative characteristics, reinforces the notion that extended family households may be an economic coping mechanism for single mothers who may not be receiving needed income from child support. Although we are not able to identify the direction of the association between child support receipt and extended-family households, it may be the case that fathers provide less support to mothers in extended households.

However, in our models controlling for head of household may indicate otherwise.

Indeed, our estimates suggest that the dynamics of extended family households are important in understanding child support receipt outcomes. When we control for whether the mother is the head of a household, we find few differences in the likelihood of receipt, with some exceptions (e.g., Paraguay, Uruguay, and the United States). This suggests that guest mothers—or those who live in the household of another--are driving differences in likelihood of receipt, reinforcing the notion that mothers may be living in extended family households to access additional resources.

Differences in child support receipt might be driven by the child support regime in each country, although this should be explored in more depth. For example, Peru and Panama are the two countries where we find no difference in the likelihood of receipt for mothers living in extended families, even considering a simple raw difference. Notably, Peru uses a different scheme for child support than the other Latin American countries in our sample. In Peru, a hybrid system is in place whereas for most of the other countries in our sample, a court system determines child support orders. It is possible this difference, that is the inclusion of the public agency in overseeing child support, combined with the lack of demographic differences between single mothers in extended family households and other single mothers, may result in more equitable receipt of child support than in countries that operate simply under a court-based model. The United States is also somewhat of a hybrid model, and we do find a decreased likelihood of child support receipt for single mothers in extended family households in our sample. Importantly, previous research found no difference in formal support and a decreased likelihood of informal support for single mothers in extended family households (Guarin and Costanzo 2020); therefore, the difference here may be in informal support, perhaps reinforcing the notion of court-based models contributing to more

equitable outcomes for these complex families.

As our results suggest, the difference in the likelihood of receiving child support among single mothers living in extended and non-extended families varies between subgroups. This highlights the importance of advancing research looking not only at mother's living arrangements but also at other characteristics to identify those mothers at higher risk of economic vulnerability and at higher risk of missing child support transfers.

These estimates should be understood in the context of some important limitations. First, this is a descriptive, exploratory study that uses cross-sectional data. Therefore, we are unable to identify causality and the ordering of events between child support receipt and living in an extended-family household; some mothers may move into an extended-family household to cope with the lack of child support receipt while others may receive less child support because of the presence of other related adults in their household. Second, while the LIS data are unparalleled in their use for comparative studies, the sample size is fairly small in some countries and there are some data differences between countries, which may make comparisons less accurate. These limitations of the LIS data mean that future research could benefit from other data sources, ideally longitudinal. Finally, we measure a few of the key characteristics of child support including whether it was received, and total annual amount received; future work should examine other important characteristics of child support such as regularity (Ha, Cancian, and Meyer 2011). Despite these limitations our study highlights the varying prevalence of extended-family households among single mothers in different countries. Importantly, it also calls attention to the number of single mother families in extended family households and underscores the importance of understanding mother's living arrangements and child support policy. These issues are relevant not only for child support policy, but for other areas of family policy, therefore opening the door

for future studies focused on the role of family policies intended to support single mothers and their children.

Conclusion

Across different countries and cultural contexts, we find that extended family households, while varying in prevalence, are quite common living arrangements for single mothers with children. We also find differences in the characteristics of single mothers who live in extended family households compared to other single mothers. Though there are commonalities across many countries in characteristics of single mothers who live in extended family households, taking a comparative perspective focused on understanding the specific country context is still important. Future research should attend to similarities and differences in characteristics of extended family households across the globe, and, in particular, the role that the welfare state and family policy regime may play in impacting these living arrangements.

We also find that mothers in extended family households are generally less likely, with some notable exceptions, to receive child support than single mothers living only with their children. This has important economic justice implications for women and families and may also emphasize a shortcoming of current policy. Although institutional arrangements of child support policies may lead to different outcomes across countries (Hakovirta et al. 2022; Cuesta et al. 2023) we do not find an obvious pattern according to the child support schemes (i.e., whether they are court based or hybrid). Though we might expect similar child support schemes to produce similar outcomes, Hakovirta and Skinner (2021) similarly found that the rules of judicial decision making in child support show no clear consistency across the scheme types. There may be a lack of clarity in the governmental role in extended families as well as in separated families in middle- and low-income countries (see Cuesta et al. 2023). Thus, more detailed research is needed to explore how different

child support schemes treat single mother families in extended families. Moreover, identifying a causal connection between living in extended-family households and child support outcomes is an area ripe for future research.

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Table 1. Country context

Country	Percentage of children living in single-mother families[1]	Children poverty rates - two parent families (50%)[2]	Children poverty rates - single-mother families (50%)[3]	Global Gender Gap Index 2021[4]	Social assistance public spending as % of GDP[5]	Family benefits public spending as % of GDP[6]	Child support regime[7]
Chile	28.1	15.2	32.6	0.736	3.5 (2015-2018)	1.74	Court
Guatemala	15.7	16.4	17.4	0.664	1.3 (2016-2020)	n.a.	Court
Panama	23.6	25.9	38.5	0.743	0.8 (2015)	n.a.	Court
Paraguay	22.4	23.6	37.5	0.707	1.3 (2016-2017)	n.a.	Court
Peru	18.1	26.7	25.8	0.749	1.2 (2015-2021)	n.a.	Hybrid
Spain	10.8	18.1	41.7	0.788	n.a.	1.27	Court
United States	19.4	12.9	46.7	0.769	n.a.	0.62	Hybrid
Uruguay	21.9	15.2	33.9	0.711	1.1 (2015)	n.a.	Court

Source: [1-3] (LIS Cross-National Data Center in Luxembourg 2023), [4] (World Economic Forum 2022), [5] (The World Bank 2023), [6] (OECD 2023), and [7] (Skinner, Bradshaw, and Davidson 2007; Cuesta, Hakovirta, and Jokela 2018; Hakovirta et al. 2022; Cuesta et al. 2023)

Table 2. Proportion of single mothers living in extended-family households

	Single mothers in total (N)	Proportion of single mothers living in extended-family households, %
Chile (2017)	5,354	18
Guatemala (2014)	1,434	57
Panama (2016)	885	25
Paraguay (2019)	617	54
Peru (2019)	2,073	22
Spain (2019)	420	25
United States (2019)	3,422	22
Uruguay (2019)	3,320	37

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2019)

Table 3. Descriptive statistics per country, single mothers and single mothers living in extended-family households.

	Chile			Guatemala			Panama			Paraguay		
	SM	SEF	T-test/ Chis-quare	SM	SEF	T-test/ Chis-quare	SM	SEF	T-test/ Chis-quare	SM	SEF	T-test/ Chis-quare
Age (Mean)	39.5	42.0	***	36.8	31.9	***	38.4	42.0	***	37.6	33.9	***
Education			***			**			***			***
Low	28	35		81	72		44	55		63	57	
Medium	50	46		15	23		36	32		20	33	
High	22	19		4	5		20	13		17	10	
Employed	81	79		65	50	***	77	78		80	67	**
Number of children			***			***			**			**
One	35	30		17	41		29	23		31	42	
Two	42	38		35	29		33	31		33	31	
Three or more	24	31		48	30		39	46		36	27	
Disposable income quintile			***			***						***
Lowest	22	13		24	17		21	18		30	12	
2	20	19		27	16		21	17		25	16	
3	20	18		20	19		22	15		19	21	
4	19	25		14	25		18	26		12	27	
Highest	19	25		14	24		18	24		15	25	

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2017)
Notes: Results within columns are for SM: Single mothers and SEF: Single mothers in extended-family households
* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001. Weighted statistics

Table 3 (continued). Descriptive statistics per country, single mothers and single mothers living in extended-family households.

	Peru			*Spain*			*United States*			*Uruguay*		
	SM	SEF	T-test/ Chis-quare	SM	SEF	T-test/ Chis-quare	SM	SEF	T-test/ Chis-quare	SM	SEF	T-test/ Chis-quare
Age (Mean)	40	42	***	43	39	***	40	36	***	40	34	***
Education						**			***			***
Low	43	40		37	39		9	13		69	80	
Medium	38	37		25	36		50	59		16	16	
High	18	24		38	25		41	28		4	4	
Employed	89	85		71	64		80	67	***	85	67	***
Number of children									***			***
One	32	29		52	46		37	45		35	52	
Two	39	38		36	36		38	35		38	31	
Three or more	29	33		12	18		25	19		27	17	
Disposable income quintile			***			***			***			***
Lowest	23	10		26	3		22	13		25	12	
2	21	16		20	21		22	14		21	18	
3	20	20		19	22		21	18		20	20	
4	19	24		18	26		19	24		17	25	
Highest	17	30		17	28		17	32		16	26	

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2017)
Notes: Results within columns are for SM: Single mothers and SEF: Single mothers in extended-family households
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Weighted statistics

Table 4. Child support receipt and amounts per country, single mothers and single mothers living in extended-family households (PPP)

	Single mothers living with children			Single mothers with children in extended-family households		
	CS receipt %	Mean	Median	CS receipt %	Mean	Median
Chile	53	4343	3109	45	3690	2590
Guatemala	20	2634	1522	11	2931	1826
Panama	35	4723	3336	42	3985	3336
Paraguay	33	3127	2211	29	2333	2196
Peru	46	2945	2403	50	3133	2470
Spain	31	5746	4728	9	4710	3377
United States	29	6988	4602	17	4663	3187
Uruguay	58	3661	2495	41	2936	2080

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2017).
Notes: Weighted frequencies and amounts; Amounts converted to PPP (USD 2017=100) for corresponding LIS year.

Table 5. Logistic regression predicting child support receipt by country (Summary of key indicator: single mother living in extended-family household)

|	Model 1		Model 2	
	b		b	
Chile (n=5,333)	-0.28	*	-	
	(0.11)		-	
Guatemala (n=1,428)	-0.62	*	-0.47	
	(0.24)		(0.31)	
Panama (881)	0.38		-	
	(0.2)		-	
Paraguay (n=1,141)	0.03		0.83	**
	(.23)		(0.31)	
Peru (n=2,123)	0.29		-	
	(0.16)		-	
Spain (n=419)	-1.54	**	-0.87	
	(0.48)		(0.87)	
United States (n=4,281)	-0.56	***	-0.49	***
	(0.12)		(0.16)	
Uruguay (n=3,826)	-0.46	***	-0.31	*
	(0.09)		(0.115)	

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2019)
Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels indicated by * p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001. Model 1 controls for mother's age, education, employment status, number of children, and income quintile. Model 2 is presented for those countries with significant results in Model 1. It controls for the same variables as Model 1 in addition to controlling for whether the mother is the household head. Chile, Panama, and Peru are excluded from model 2 because all custodial mothers are identified as household heads in the data
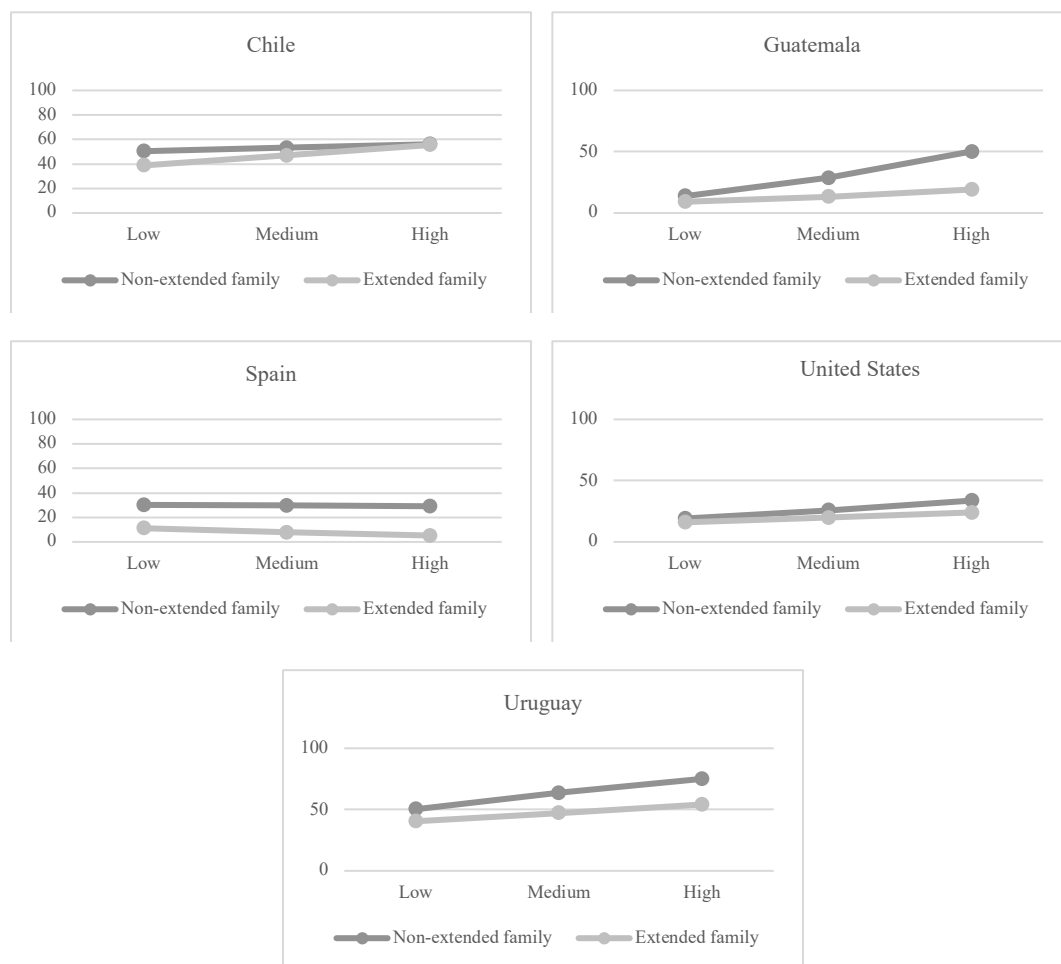
Appendix A. Supplementary Figures

Figure A1. Predicted probabilities of child support receipt by the interaction between living in an extended-family household and income quintile by country
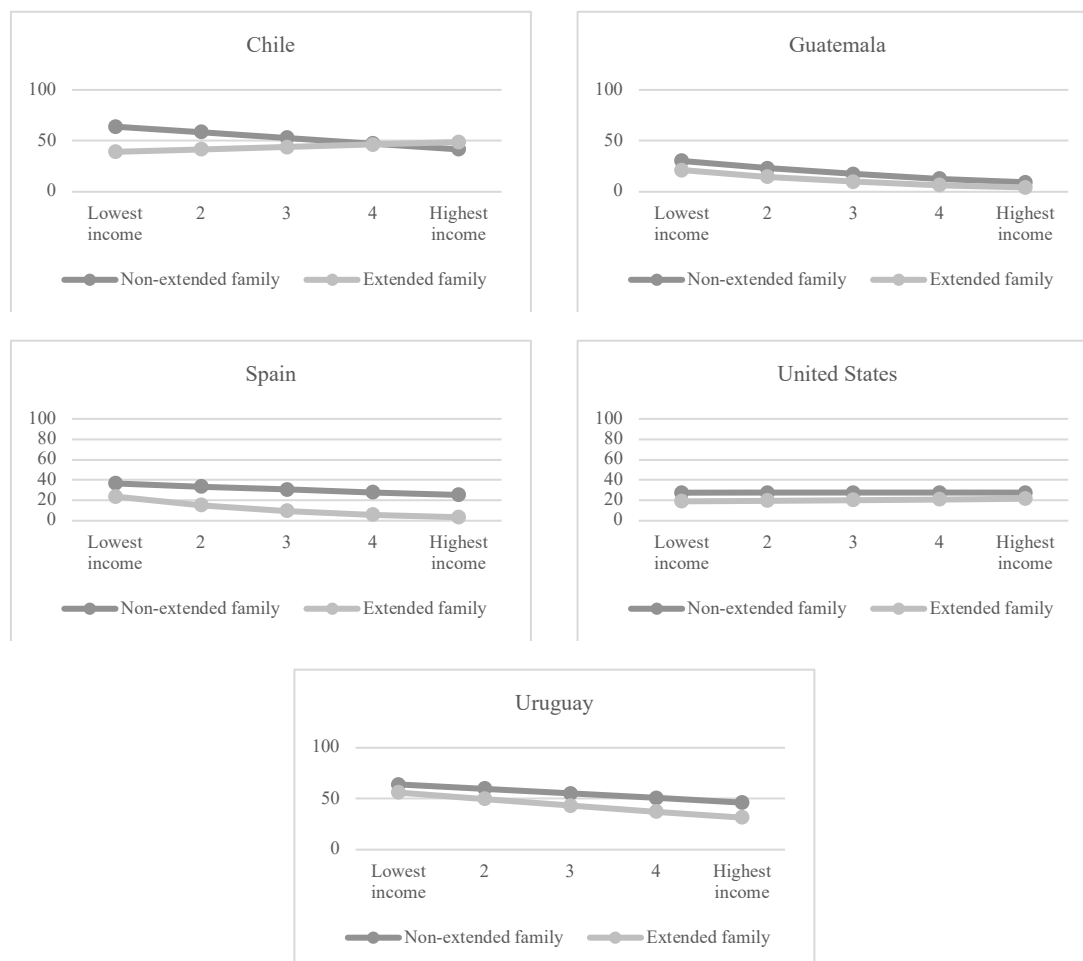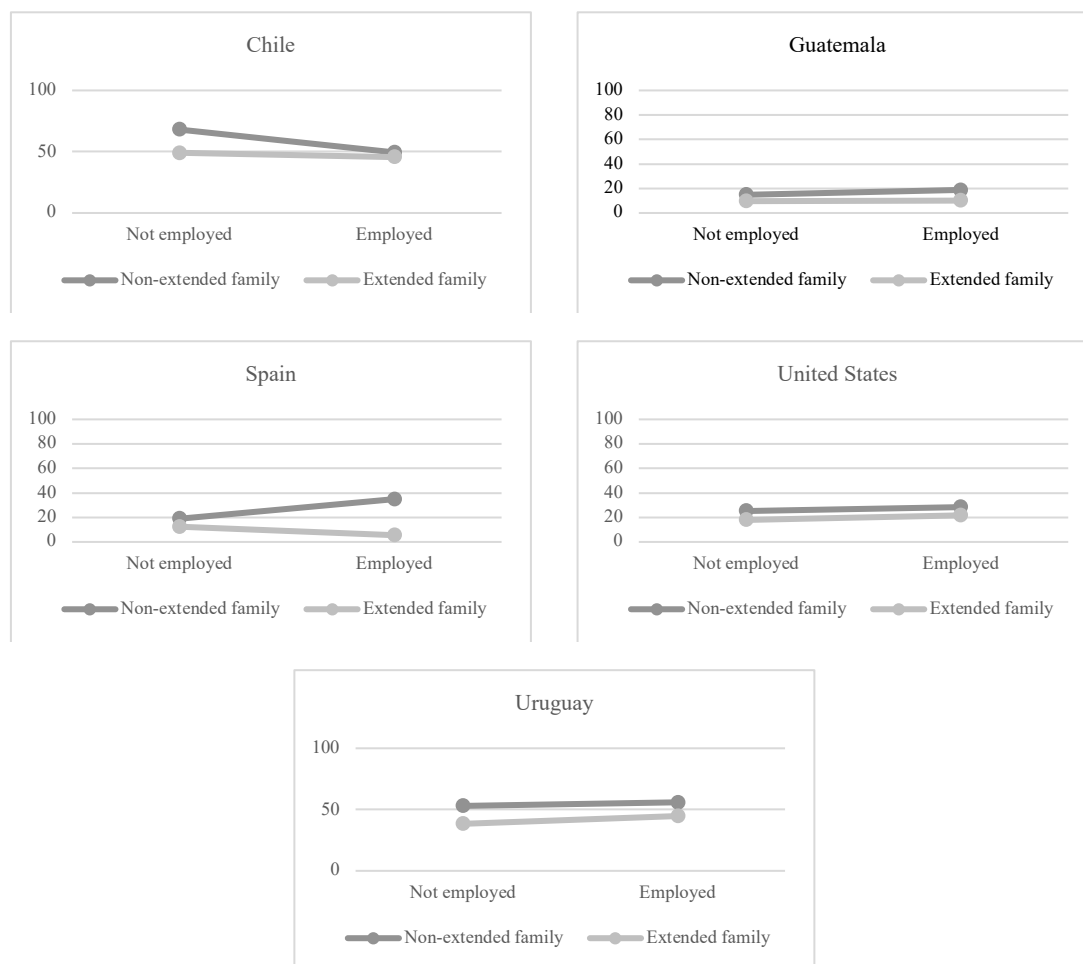

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2019)

Figure A2. Predicted probabilities of child support receipt by the interaction between living in an extended-family household and education by country
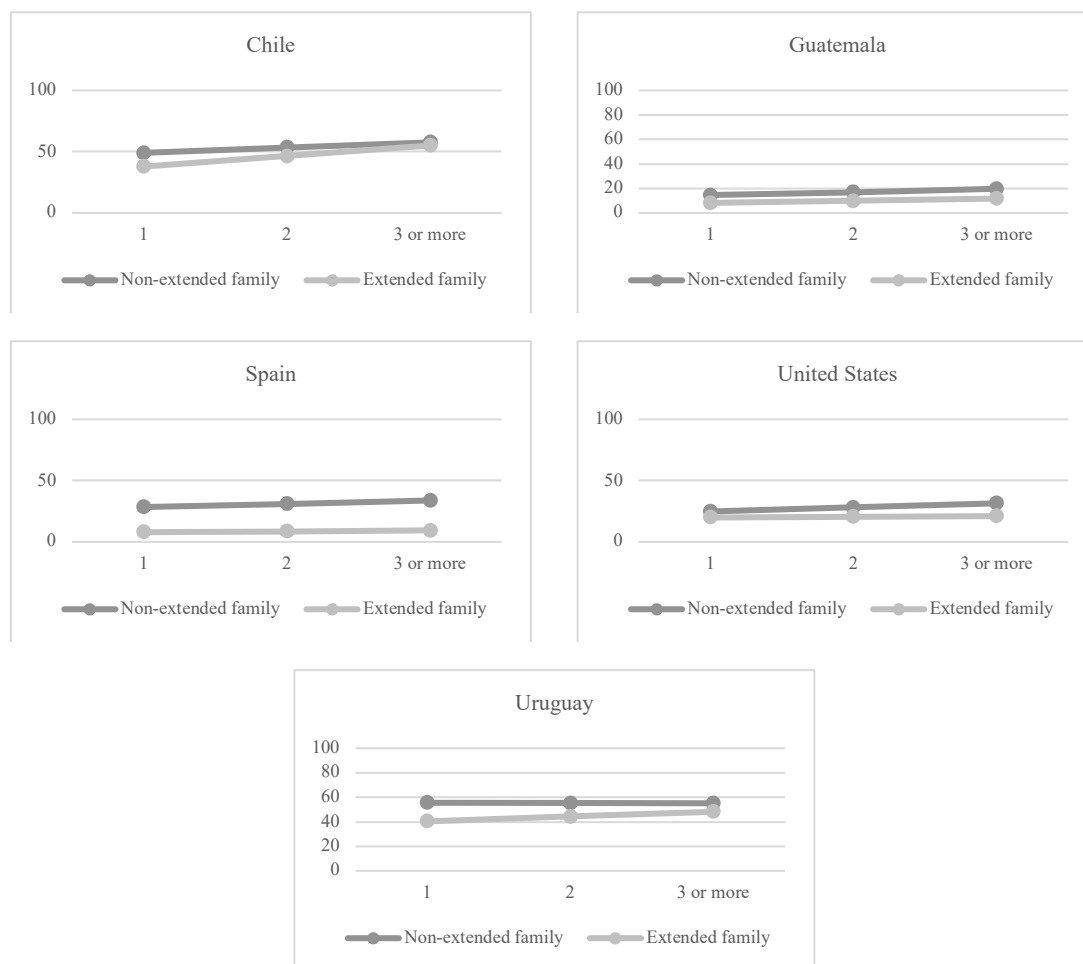

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2019)

Figure A3. Predicted probabilities of child support receipt by the interaction between living in an extended-family household and employment status by country

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2019)

Figure A4. Predicted probabilities of child support receipt by the interaction between living in an extended-family household and number of children by country

Source: Own calculations based on Luxembourg Income Study (Waves 2014-2019)